

MINUTES

Present:

Elliot Stern, *Emeritus Professor of Evaluation Research, Lancaster University (Chairman of the Board)*

Julian Barr, *President of the UK Evaluation Society*

Philip Bradburn, *Audit Manager, National Audit Office*

Siobhan Campbell, *Deputy Chief Scientific Advisor, Department for Transport*

Penny Hawkins, *Independent Consultant*

Gary Kass, *Deputy Chief Scientist, Natural England*

Jamie Saunders, *Strategy and Engagement Officer, City of Bradford District Council*

Jim Watson, *Research Director, UK Energy Research Centre*

Nigel Gilbert, *Professor of Sociology, University of Surrey (CECAN Director)*

Ben Shaw, *Director of Policy Studies Institute (CECAN Deputy Director)*

In attendance:

Kelly Boazman, *CECAN Impact Manager, University of Surrey (Secretary)*

Helen Wilkinson, *Director, Risk Solutions (CECAN project partner)*

Apologies were received from Rebekah Eden, Liam Kelly, Sarah Whatmore and James Wilsdon

1. Welcome, matters arising from previous Minutes and Agenda for this meeting (Elliot Stern)

Elliot Stern (ES) opened the meeting, noted the apologies received and invited everyone else to introduce themselves. ES welcomed Philip Bradburn (PB) to the Board. PB is replacing Jeremy Lonsdale (National Audit Office) who has stepped down from the CECAN Advisory Board since the last meeting. ES announced that Ronan Palmer (Ofwat) has also stepped down from the Board. Ofwat is still represented by Rebekah Eden (although not present at this meeting). ES thanked Jeremy and Ronan *in absentia* for their contributions to the Board.

Jamie Saunders (JS) commented that in relation to Point 7.2 in the Minutes of the previous meeting (the possibility of applying for funding through the GCRF in relation to working on Nexus issues in developing countries) there could be contacts in Bradford who might be interested in this. Nigel Gilbert (NG) said that he would welcome a discussion about this off-line.

Julian Barr (JB) asked for an update in relation to Point 4 in the Minutes of the previous meeting (the CECAN Syllabus). NG confirmed that from the Syllabus a suite of CPD training has been developed and is now running. Three workshops have taken place, each with between 10 and 20 participants. There are two further workshops planned: one on Agent-Based Modelling and another on Process Modelling. Feedback from participants thus far has been positive and it is expected that the provision will continue to expand. NG noted that at the previous meeting it had been suggested that CECAN might run CPD courses in conjunction with UKES and said that he would still be happy to explore that possibility. NG further commented that the CECAN team is learning 'as we go' in terms of what works best: one workshop had to be cancelled because no one registered for it and it was concluded that this was because the title was unclear and too long; it has also been determined that participants prefer one-day courses as opposed to half-day ones. ES asked how the CECAN CPD courses dovetailed with existing provision within government. NG observed that the team has good knowledge of what is taking place within academic circles and via UKES, but little is

known about what is offered within Government. Siobhan Campbell (SC) explained that internal training is usually at a fairly basic level, with specialists (such as CECAN) brought in to cover material at a higher level. NG added that CECAN had recently been contacted by Department for Education (DfE) for something like this.

It was agreed that there were no further matters arising from the Minutes of the previous meeting and they were accepted as an accurate indication of the discussions that took place.

2. Update on CECAN activities (Nigel Gilbert)

A document entitled "Update of CECAN Activities" [paper 1] was circulated to the Board prior to the meeting and NG presented highlights from this, which included:

An update on funding for CECAN 2

NG shared the good news that, following an invitation from the ESRC to bid for Transition Funding, the CECAN team submitted a proposal and this has been successful. A copy of the proposal was circulated to the Board following its submission on 14th May 2018 and again in advance of this meeting [paper 4]. NG explained that he had attended a panel interview with Surrey's Dean of the Faculty of Arts and Social Sciences (Prof Graham Miller).

A condition of the funding is that CECAN 2 must plan for financial sustainability as the Transition Funding tapers off towards the end of the three-year award period. NG pointed out that a specific work stream is dedicated to this in the funding proposal.

CECAN Annual Conference

The event took place on the 11th of July at One Birdcage Walk in London. NG thanked those Board members who were able to attend and/or contribute to the conference. NG reported that there were c. 170 delegates in attendance, of which around 80% were from the public sector. Feedback received has been extremely positive and ES agreed that it was a very good event and a useful day. NG noted that the keynote speech delivered by Matthew Taylor (CEO of the Royal Society of Arts) was very interesting and well received and CECAN will likely pursue a link with the RSA.

New approaches to the Participatory Steering and Evaluation of Complex Adaptive Systems

ESRC had invited CECAN to bid for a small amount of additional funding to develop links with researchers internationally. CECAN has been awarded c. £25k for work that will focus on exploring and synthesising new approaches to collective understanding, experiencing and interacting with socio-ecological-technical systems in which numerous scales of dynamics and complexity are at play. Led primarily by Dr Alex Penn, the project will examine the value of such approaches and how they could be used in policy evaluation and appraisal, in particular to allow ordinary people (rather than simply policy makers or experts) to understand, steer and evaluate change in their own complex social systems. Building on the success of the CECAN International Symposium (November 2017), CECAN will develop collaborative links between groups in the USA, Japan, Australia and the UK, including exchange visits and joint publications, as well as potential joint proposals for research on participatory evaluation methods and tools.

ES observed that this is an interesting evolution since this has not traditionally been at the core of CECAN's work. Gary Kass (GK) shared his view that there is a need to build capacity among the general public to understand and engage with transdisciplinary research.

Seminars, webinars

The series of CECAN seminars and webinars has continued. Seminars are videoed and shared via the CECAN website. Increasingly webinars are being organised in favour of seminars as this reaches a greater audience. NG invited members of the Board to contact him if they would be interested in delivering a seminar or webinar.

Evaluation Policy Practice Notes (EPPNs)

CECAN continues to publish a series of EPPNs, the most recent of which was circulated to the Board in advance of the meeting [paper 2]. ES asked about how the EPPNs were used and NG guessed that they are most likely used as resources to help people find out about developments in the field. GK observed that they are likely to be used as a means for justifying the use of new methods in practice (i.e. "*these experts are doing it this way, so we should too*").

Fellowships

One new Fellowship has begun since the last meeting. NG shared some examples of the outputs from other Fellowships.

Publications

Lots of time is being spent writing up CECAN's work to date. There are currently six CECAN published works, with a further four 'ready to submit' and over twenty papers planned or already being written.

ES asked NG to comment on the cross-over between CECAN's engagement and application-focussed agenda and that of the world of academic publications, which is interested in innovative work that is taking the field forward, developing new methodologies, theories and so on. NG explained that many CECAN publications use the engagement as the topic of the paper, for example a recently published multi-authored paper on policy modelling¹, which took the work that CECAN had been doing as examples to illustrate the argument made. A paper for the journal *Research Policy* is also being written, which again is going to be drawing on CECAN's experiences as well as other things. As a third example, NG explained that another paper is being written about the CECAN approach to Systems Mapping. This is a technical paper to demonstrate what CECAN has developed as a result of doing Systems Mapping in a wide variety of settings.

SC commented that it would be useful to run some seminars based on CECAN's experiences in the case studies. This would help with the need to get government, decision makers and even the analyst community to understand what the application of CECAN's work is. NG explained that a series of EPPNs based on the case studies is forthcoming and agreed that it would be a good idea to run corresponding seminars. SC said that she could publicise these through the CGEG. Ben Shaw (BS) added that a first attempt to showcase the case study work was made during the breakout sessions at the annual conference.

Other activities

Work with BEIS is ongoing following some delay because of issues with the NDA. Work is underway on a small contract with HSE. Work is continuing with DEFRA on Bovine Tuberculosis. There is an engagement coming up with DWP (details still to be confirmed) and CECAN has successfully bid jointly with Risk Solutions for some work with FSA.

Upcoming events

As mentioned, there will be further seminars, webinars and workshops. An event with the What Works Centres is being planned, as is a workshop focussed on commissioning and procurement. A Writing Retreat is planned for the 30th of September and the CECAN Intra-Project meeting will take place on the 24th and 25th October. NG explained that Co-Funders have been invited to Day 1 of the meeting in the past and he would like to extend that invitation to members of the Board. ES thanked NG for this invitation.

Priorities for the next six months

The priority for the next six months is planning for CECAN 2. JB raised the point that CECAN could consider producing a sort of 'Annual Report' to highlight more explicitly the activities and associated impacts. It was generally agreed that publicising CECAN's achievements (and impact) would be worthwhile, for example on the CECAN website.

3. Current issues and challenges: (i) Reactions, suggestions and advice from the Board about the CECAN Annex to the Magenta Book; (ii) Diffusing innovation to evaluation practitioners and consultants (Helen Wilkinson)

Helen Wilkinson (HW) gave a short presentation explaining the work that CECAN has undertaken to create an Annex on Complexity for the forthcoming revision to the Magenta Book. A draft of the Annex was circulated to the Board in advance of the meeting [paper 3].

HW explained that CECAN had been asked to provide an annex on complex policy evaluation for the revised edition of the Magenta Book and that she has been working on this along with other CECAN team members Dione Hills, Alex Penn and Martha Bickett. Ian Christie (CECAN Co-Investigator from Surrey's Centre for Environment and Sustainability) and NG have also been involved with drafting the annex and there has been oversight by a Steering Group comprised of representatives from DfID, DfT, DEFRA, HSE, DWP, Scottish Government and UKES. HW explained that drafting the Annex has been a highly iterative and developmental process and the main challenges have been around identifying consistent terms to talk about complexity, being transparent in the language used around evaluation and being consistent with the rest of the Magenta Book. The current version of the Annex is now ready for feedback from a wider group, including the Advisory Board, and HW welcomed comments from those members present. These included:

¹ Nigel Gilbert, Petra Ahrweiler, Pete Barbrook-Johnson, Kavin Preethi Narasimhan and Helen Wilkinson, *Computational Modelling of Public Policy: Reflections on Practice*, Journal of Artificial Societies and Social Simulation 21 (1) 14 <http://jasss.soc.surrey.ac.uk/21/1/14.html> DOI: 10.18564/jasss.3669

- ES asked what the latest feedback had been from the Steering Group and HW reported that Bev Bishop (HSE) had found the latest version to be “very clear”.
- SC said that she found the Magenta Book session at the CECAN conference to be very good and had heard lots of positive feedback about it.
- ES noted that it would be difficult to tie in with the rest of the Magenta Book because what the Annex is saying is something quite different to the content of the main book but that this is something positive. SC added that the revised edition of the Magenta Book would be more neutral about what types of evaluation are appropriate and when.
- GK relayed a conversation that he had with HW and Ian Christie about the importance of ensuring that the main contents in the Magenta Book are effective in driving readers to the Annex and, in return, that the contents of the Annex are effective in ‘greeting’ those readers. He felt it is important that readers do not dismiss the Annex as being ‘too advanced’ for them.
- SC reported the latest timescales for publication of the revised Magenta Book, which should be available at the end of 2018.
- SC also reported that the Green Book also now refers much more to the Magenta Book
- GK reported that Natural England has been working with the Horizon Scanning Service on a Futures Toolkit. This is not formal guidance but it is important to bear in mind that this and other toolkits are available
- ES commented that such a remarkable shift in emphasis and focus of the Magenta Book guidance is a considerable breakthrough and quite an achievement for CECAN. JS added that everyone, including the general public, should be made aware of this ‘ground-breaking’ change in how policy is done
- Everyone agreed that the commentary and general narrative around the new Magenta Book and this Annex is very important and SC said that she would work with CECAN to jointly publicise the new material at the appropriate time
- ES would welcome a reflective piece for submission to *Evaluation* (of which he is Editor) from the authors of the Annex about the process of creating it
- ES added that engagement with those outside of policy-making and policy analysis is also key, for example consultants and the evaluation community outside of academia

4. CECAN 2: Future funding (Nigel Gilbert)

NG explained that CECAN is grateful to ESRC for renewing the Centre’s funding but noted that this is *Transition Funding*, which means that it will taper down over the three-year funding period and CECAN will eventually receive nothing. It is essential, then, that CECAN is able to secure alternative funding. For context, NG explained that the Transition Funding scheme is only about one year old, and so there is not yet much experience elsewhere in securing alternative funding. Some other Centres are getting funding from the European Research Council, but this is not a likely source for CECAN.

NG shared with the Board that he has persuaded ESRC to talk with BEIS and DEFRA about obtaining funding from them. Although it is not expected that large sums will be available, NG is hopeful for a contribution of some kind. NG is aware that these departments will expect something in return for their funding support and NG has given this some thought: CECAN is not about *doing* evaluations, rather it is about *how* one does evaluations (and the consequences of that), i.e. “meta evaluation”. NG is concerned that BEIS and DEFRA may not see this as a sufficient contribution as this is very much a problem to be solved ‘for the common good’ rather than specifically for them. With this in mind, NG has considered other options:

- Idea 1: CECAN could provide advice about how to carry out complex evaluations (i.e. an extension of CECAN 1 and extending into policy appraisal)
- Idea 2: CECAN could enter into a ‘quality assurance’ role. BEIS and DEFRA currently have no way of independently accrediting the evaluations that they do, so this might be attractive to them. NG underlined that his idea refers specifically to the accreditation of complex evaluations and that this would be an accreditation of evaluations not evaluators (which UKES has already covered).

NG invited comments and feedback from the Board, and these included:

- Penny Hawkins (PH) said, with regard to independent quality assurance of evaluations, that this happens already within DfID. ES added that there are a number of European Quality Frameworks in existence and that this is quite a well populated field.
- ES said that he liked CECAN’s power to convene an extended network of people working in a range of related areas (as evidenced at the recent conference). He suggested thinking of CECAN 2 as less of a Centre and more of a Hub to maintain a dialogue with people who are interested in and involved with complexity from all sorts of disciplines. NG agreed that this idea was worth exploring as well, but obtaining funding for ‘Hubs’ is extremely difficult. GK suggested that it could be run like a club with ‘membership fees’.

- GK suggested formalising a relationship with UKES to strengthen the capacity building provision for practitioners and then also consider not only accreditation of evaluations but of complexity-friendly evaluation training. ES agreed that a strategic alliance with UKES would add credibility to CECAN's role as an accreditor in this area.
- ES advised that it might be wise to start thinking more about a vision or a mission before trying to identify specific activities. In doing this, certain activities that one might not otherwise think about could come into focus.
- GK felt that there is a wealth of opportunity for CECAN 2 beyond evaluation to the whole policy process but warned that there are lots of other actors acting in that space and thus CECAN must carve out a unique role within that much bigger system. JB suggested that, despite this, there is an interesting interface between policy making and evaluating and thinking about whether those who commission evaluations are commissioning something that is both realistic but that also talks to the complexity of the policy and the ability of the evaluation to use the tools.
- PH said that she could see potential for a formalised relationship or collaboration between CECAN and the DfID systems because there is probably very low capacity within the current group of people who would carry out the quality checks in this area. PH added that this is a paid service.
- On the subject of peer review, HW shared that in her experience an evaluation cannot be reviewed simply by reading the end report, rather reviewers must work alongside the evaluators. CECAN has the ability to become a 'critical friend' offering constructive and iterative review, i.e. not just an imposed per-reviewer at the end of the process. CECAN has the added benefit of being able to 'swap' team members in and out as the evaluation progresses and needs change. In this way, CECAN is in an excellent position to profit from the current gap in *joining up* appraisal and evaluation.

5. CECAN 2: What we want to do (Ben Shaw)

BS gave a presentation outlining the objectives, work streams, activities and ways of working currently envisaged for CECAN 2. BS explained that the overall objective of CECAN remains unchanged: to transform the practice of policy evaluation in Nexus areas and make it fit for a complex world. BS then identified the five work streams as described in the ESRC Transition Funding proposal [paper 4], which are:

- Work stream 1: Complexity-appropriate evaluation methods across the policy cycle
- Work stream 2: CECAN Methods Innovation Lab
- Work stream 3: Real world testing and refining of complexity-appropriate evaluation methods
- Work stream 4: Building capacity to deliver complexity-appropriate policy analysis
- Work stream 5: Securing CECAN's future

BS explained that work streams 2 to 4 are essentially the current work of CECAN 1, i.e. building new methods or approaches, testing them and building capacity for them to be used. Work streams 1 and 5 are new.

BS noted that this programme of work is indicative of what the CECAN team wants to do. CECAN 1 was very challenge-led, working with Co-Funders whereas with CECAN 2 there might be a need to think more about a 'traditional research' way of working. This is CECAN's attempt to prioritise and focus its efforts.

DISCUSSION

Comments about work stream 1: GK asked whether this is about how one might bring complexity appropriate methods into policy appraisal / policy analysis broadly or whether the focus was specifically within complexity appropriate evaluation and how that can be applied to different parts of policy analysis. BS explained that during CECAN 1 the question of whether the work was focussed on evaluations or rather the contribution that evaluation makes to the policy process kept coming up (or, indeed, whether policy should be developed in an entirely different way). There is a desire to start unpacking those ideas and explore them using the case study methodology developed in CECAN 1. From this GK observed that the first work stream is therefore still very evaluation focussed: 'can we get evaluation better embedded?' rather than 'how can we help policy making better able to deal with complexity?' BS added his observation that CECAN 1 has taught the team that the difference between evaluation and appraisal is artificial and instead CECAN should be looking at policy development.

Comments about work stream 2: ES said that he liked how CECAN has identified a gap for innovative work between Systems Mapping and Theories of Change.

Comments about work stream 3: SC asked what in-roads CECAN has made to engaging with the Industrial Strategy and BS explained that so far this has mainly been through the work with DEFRA. SC agreed that the Industrial Strategy is a good hook for raising CECAN's profile and reach but warned that it is very important to be clear about how that engagement will work. ES suggested 'escaping from the Nexus', either abandoning it all together or extending to other nexuses, for instance Health, Social Care, Transport etc. He suggested thinking strategically about

who CECAN would like to work with and NG added that he would welcome suggestions from the Board of specific potential new partners.

Comments about work stream 4: BS explained that in addition to the aim of generally building capacity (from CECAN 1), the work stream now includes the aim of understanding how to build institutional capacity. This allows for more traditional academic research work. GK observed that the objective of understanding how to build capacity (rather than 'building capacity') is more realistic and feasible given CECAN's size, funding and time available. ES agreed and added that there is a vast literature in this area and advised CECAN to undertake a literature review. GK felt it would be important to align with others who are working in this area and ES advised being wary of 'wars' between disciplines, for example Decision Science.

Comments about work stream 5: SC advised linking the activities in work stream 5 to the other four work streams. ES felt there could be great opportunities for CECAN as a result of upcoming funding cuts in Whitehall and subsequent reduction in and/or merging of evaluation services. He proposed that strategic local alliances would open up scope for someone to provide tools and sustain networks, filling the gaps left by devolution (for example). GK suggested thinking about in-kind support rather than direct financial contributions, i.e. resource management. Jim Watson (JW) was sceptical of this approach, explaining that in his experience it is often difficult to convince people to change or adapt their work in this way.

Further support from the Board: ES asked how the Board can be part of the process of clarification during the next six months of planning. NG explained that the way CECAN normally works is to establish small groups with a 'Scrum Master' so members of the Board can certainly be included in that. There is also an opportunity to be involved at the aforementioned Intra-Project meeting in October.

6. Role of Advisory Board in CECAN 2 - roles, membership

All members of the Board agreed that they are happy to continue. A general discussion then took place about what is working well with the Advisory Board and how this might be carried through to CECAN 2. Points included:

- NG likes how the Advisory Board pushes CECAN to think outside of the box and would like this to continue.
- ES is impressed by the Board's depth of knowledge and cross of experience. He likes the idea of the Advisory Board being included as a targeted group at events such as the upcoming Intra-Project meeting. ES encouraged CECAN to make use of the Board outside of meetings, for example if CECAN needs to find out more about something a Board member has expertise / experience in.
- NG invited suggestions from the Board about possible new members but added that he was cautious about potential conflicts of interest with Co-funders. JS suggested that representation from industry might be useful, for instance Anglian Water.
- It was noted that in CECAN 2 the Co-Funders Group may not continue in its current format (currently the Advisory Board provides advice and challenges thinking; the Co-Funders Group meets to discuss support funding; the Executive Group is responsible for internal governance). GK suggested using the Co-Funders Group as more of a 'user group' in CECAN 2.

7. AOB and date of next meeting

Nothing further was discussed under AOB.

The next meeting will take place in late November / early December. KB will arrange for the CECAN Centre Managers to circulate a Doodle Poll for availability and then confirm the date, location and time. **[ACTION: KB]**

(NB: This action is now completed)